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GREED OR INSPIRATION: MONETIZING SOCIAL ISSUES THROUGH ADVERTISING CAMPAIGNS

***Abstract.** With the steady rise of the Internet and social media in the 21st century companies are shifting their attention to socially conscious advertising. The demand is now formed by informed and opinionated individuals, by an active and attentive society. In order to attract customers, organisations often apply advertising campaigns that are more focused on social issues than on the product itself.*

***Keywords:** socially conscious advertising, social issues, marketing ethics, multinational company, corporate social responsibility.*

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ЖАДНОСТЬ ИЛИ ВДОХНОВЕНИЕ: МОНЕТИЗАЦИЯ СОЦИАЛЬНЫХ ВОПРОСОВ С ПОМОЩЬЮ РЕКЛАМНЫХ КАМПАНИЙ

Аннотация. *С неуклонным ростом Интернета и социальных сетей в 21 веке компании переключают свое внимание на социально ориентированную рекламу. Спрос сейчас формируется информированными и самоуверенными людьми, активным и внимательным обществом. Для привлечения клиентов организации часто применяют рекламные кампании, которые более ориентированы на социальные проблемы, чем на сам продукт.*

Ключевые слова: *социально сознательная реклама, социальные вопросы, маркетинговая этика, транснациональная компания, корпоративная социальная ответственность.*

Introduction

Throughout the past five to ten years with the steady rise of the Internet and social media people have been given access to new ideas as well as a personal platform for self-expression. People are becoming more vocal about their stand on politics and social issues. As a result, large companies are pressured to disclose their policies in relation to the environment, consumerism, class, gender and race inequality, fair wages, etc.

While some organisations choose to express the required minimum in order not to appear tone-deaf to the current social climate, other companies seek ways to capitalize on it. The latter observe that most people regardless of their generation put a lot of value in their opinions and, therefore, tend to trust companies that share those values. This new kind of customer is more inclined to buy the brand they trust rather than the product itself. The demand is now formed by informed and opinionated individuals, by an active and woke society. And that is where socially conscious advertising campaigns come in. In order to understand this marketing style better let us create its profile.

Who?

Aligning with consumer values is easy enough but maintaining corporate social responsibility may prove to be costly. Large multinational companies have long been

using their customers' opinions in order to manipulate their buying habits. These companies often choose their 'battlefield' – an area of social problems their CSR teams focus on and main social impact is eventually left.

Some startups and small companies also utilize socially conscious advertising in order to enter their respective markets. However, these organisations often opt to focus on one or two smaller issues.

How?

How often does one see a commercial and feels the irresistible urge to share it with their friends and family?

Lately a great number of companies have been using social media platforms for advertising. Often a company develops an inspiring catchphrase that is later used in ads: television, radio and social media commercials, billboards and sponsored influencer content.

Billboards are often used to draw potential customers' attention to the brands agenda. They need to be loud and memorable.

Social media influencers help maintain the company image. Brands sponsor YouTube videos and Instagram posts that attract creator's followers. Sometimes an influencer becomes an ambassador of a brand which requires to express support for everything the company stands for.

Commercials are most notable as through them organisations need to convey the importance of the cause they support. These short videos often tell a story that is vaguely linked to the company's product. They are inspiring. They are heartwarming. They evoke trust.

What?

As mentioned earlier, the client these days pays not just for a product but for ideas the company that supplies the product represents. Therefore, the organisations that utilize socially conscious advertising either donate certain fractions of their revenue to charities dedicated to specific social issues or provide other forms of financial support. When a company becomes a proponent of a certain idea it becomes

responsible to uphold it. There are several main themes companies choose to be socially responsible for.

Consumerism, inclusivity and sustainability (IKEA, Reformation, Savage X Fenty, Fjällräven Kånken, H&M).

Many brands are concerned about the amount of goods an individual consumes throughout their lifetime as well as the waste unlimited consumption produces. These companies encourage their clients to seek ways to use their products more sustainably. The production value of these brands is claimed to be higher so to provide ethically produced goods the prices need to be higher as well.

The american clothing brand Reformation, that built its image around sustainable, responsible and ethical production, has been accused of fostering an environment in which people of colour were routinely overlooked for advancement in the company and had their concerns ignored. The company was later accused of hypocrisy: they claim to challenge fast fashion brands while implementing the same practices (lack of size and workplace diversity as well as substantial quality of the garments).

Feminism (Always, Nike, Barbie, Dove, L'Oréal, Pantene)

According to R. Abreu Rodrigues, the term femvertising (female empowerment advertising) is a marketing and communication strategy used by brands by means of which they seek to inspire and empower women of any age through pro-female messages while promoting their products and generating greater brand engagement [1]. Large organisations often use idioms, like #GirlPower or #GirlBoss, to connect with the female audience and remind them of the shared experiences of womanhood.

The campaign by P&G/Always “Like a Girl” (2014), which as of January 2021 has over 69 million views on YouTube, challenges a mainly negative meaning of the expression. It illustrates the negative impact of this misleading usage as an insult on women's self-confidence, starting from puberty up to the adult age. This video is specifically made to be inspirational and easy to share. However, the bottom line is that

it does not disclose how exactly P&G helps ‘bringing puberty education to millions of adolescent girls’ [2].

Culture wars (Coca-Cola, Pepsi, Marks & Spencer + all of the above)

A complacent customer is no longer the main target of advertising. The term ‘woke’, according to Merriam-Webster, is a political term which, originated in the United States; refers to a perceived awareness of issues which concern social justice and racial justice.

One of the most disastrous ‘woke campaigns’ of the 2010s was the so-called ‘Kendall Jenner for PEPSI’ commercial. This campaign reduced social movements that have been inspiring people to actively fight against injustice to solving the problem of police brutality with a bottle of PEPSI. This exposed the fact that the company was absolutely tone-deaf to the underlying issue and was simply trying to capitalize on it.

Opinions

When all is said and done, the question remains: should we really praise these companies for their marketing practices? On the one hand, they do bring attention to and help resolve some social issues which otherwise would remain underfunded. On the other hand, those are not selfless acts: the companies get more clients so their profits rise. Besides, by becoming advocates for certain problems these companies tamper with people's perception of these problems.

In conclusion, there is nothing wrong with organisations providing help where it is needed as long as the company image does not overshadow the issue in question. Most importantly, mere words are not enough: when a company chooses to be vocal about a social issue, actions need to be taken, that’s a matter of social responsibility.

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